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Preparing library and information studies students for an AI-driven future: student perceptions and curriculum insights from the iSchool at University College Dublin (UCD), Ireland

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Abstract

Introduction. This paper reports on a study of MLIS (Master of Library and Information Studies) and Graduate Diploma LIS students at UCD's iSchool, examining their perceptions of AI's impact on the LIS workplace, its influence on their professional competence and preparedness for roles requiring AI knowledge and skills, and the AI-related content they deem essential for the curriculum.

Method. An anonymous online survey was conducted targeting MLIS and Graduate Diploma LIS students at UCD's iSchool in Dublin, Ireland.

Analysis. A mixed-methods analysis of the survey data was used. Quantitative responses were analysed using SurveyMonkey's reporting features, while qualitative responses to two open-ended questions were coded thematically in Microsoft Excel.

Results. The results reveal students' ambivalence and ethical concerns about AI's impact on their profession, alongside interest in developing AI competencies. They recognise efficiency benefits but emphasise human-centred services and call for integrating ethics, privacy, and AI literacy into the curriculum to prepare for evolving roles.

Conclusion. AI offers efficiency and workflow improvements for LIS, but students' ethical concerns highlight the need for curricula that combine technical engagement with critical reflection to prepare graduates for responsible use.

Introduction

Since the public release of ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022, higher education (HE) and its associated services – including academic libraries, writing centres, and educational technology support – have been grappling with the new normal of teaching and learning. All over the world, AI is trending, and many regions are enacting AI laws. Recent regulatory developments, including the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, have further heightened the urgency for AI literacy across sectors, raising questions about where responsibility for education and training should lie (European Parliament & Council of Europe, 2024).

For decades, library and information service professionals have educated their communities about information literacy and related concepts, such as digital literacy, data literacy, and algorithmic literacy. Libraries – including public, academic, special, and school libraries – often lead the way in teaching their users about new technologies and provide a safe space for individuals to explore digital tools and applications at no cost. With this in mind, the encroaching impact of AI on library services has naturally been under scrutiny for several years. For example, a paper by Cox (2023), in which he sought to explore the potential impact of AI on academic librarianship, focused chiefly on the area of knowledge discovery and the various strategic approaches libraries might choose in incorporating AI into library operations and practice. At the time of writing, Cox referred to *‘the low current adoption of AI’* (2023, p. 378) in academic libraries and the lack of empirical data on which any analysis could be based. Since then, however, technological developments have accelerated this discussion, and in 2024, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) highlighted AI and AI Literacy as a *‘Top Trend’*, noting their *‘profound implications for academic libraries in the future’* (Research Planning and Review Committee, 2024, para. 2). Recent professional literature documents a growing range of AI applications across library services, including discovery, reference, cataloguing, and user support (Adetayo, 2023; Huang et al., 2024; Hodonu-Wusu, 2025; Houston & Corrado, 2023; Johnson et al., 2024; Lund & Wang, 2023; Torres, 2024; Vrana, 2025; Yamson, 2023). Some discussions focus on how library staff might take ownership of AI in their institutions, articulating a rationale based on librarians’ traditional ethical approach to technology deployment, which is embedded in their codes of practice, as well as their general stewardship of digital development in their libraries, including user training (e.g., Fruehauf et al., 2024; Ghosh & McCoy, 2024; Oddone et al., 2024). One of three major artificial intelligence (AI) strategies proposed in the recent *‘IFLA artificial intelligence special interest group report’* presents AI literacy as a key leadership opportunity for librarians in all sectors: *‘the strategy most aligned to existing library practices and librarian identities, particularly in university, school and public libraries, is to take a lead role in promoting AI literacy’* (Cox, 2024, 21).

Consequently, it is becoming increasingly apparent that graduates of professional LIS programmes will be required to demonstrate AI skills and competencies to ensure their competitiveness in the LIS job market and to progress in their careers.

Research objectives

The goal of this study was to understand how MLIS and Graduate Diploma LIS students, who were enrolled in UCD’s iSchool during the 2024-2025 academic year, perceive the effects of AI on the LIS workplace and to investigate if emerging visions of AI-integrated libraries and information services are affecting their self-perceptions of professional competency and preparedness to enter the workplace post-graduation. We also aimed to discover what they would like to learn about AI in their programmes and how such learning might be best facilitated. To frame the study, our research questions were as follows:

1. What are current MLIS and Graduate Diploma LIS students’ perceptions regarding the effects of AI on library and information services?

2. How do current MLIS and Graduate Diploma LIS students rate their own preparedness to join AI-integrated workplaces post-graduation?
3. How do current MLIS and Graduate Diploma LIS students think their professional programmes should prepare them for the AI-integrated workplace?

Literature review

The field of LIS has consistently integrated societal and technological advancements into its educational practices. For example, during the rapid expansion of the Internet, Mehra (2004, p. 5) argued that

‘in the modern age of the Internet, the primary role of LIS educators is to train and prepare students to develop skills that will help them provide service to users in terms of users’ changing needs in the new technological environment’.

Similarly, with the advent of mobile technology in the early and mid-2000s, mobile applications began to influence LIS education (see Havelka, 2013; Parry, 2011; Walsh, 2012). These earlier periods of technological and societal change provide a useful historical lens for understanding how LIS education is now responding to AI-driven transformations. Several recent studies are relevant to our research as they also examined students’ perceptions of their AI literacy readiness and the potential impact of AI technologies on the future of LIS education and overall employability. In a US-based study, Morris and Malady (2025) explore the shared perspectives of faculty and students on integrating generative AI into LIS education. They stress that evaluating curricula requires balancing ‘creativity, scepticism, eagerness, and restraint’ (p. 570), a stance that resists adopting technology for its own sake while still preparing students for AI’s impact. This U.S.-centred perspective highlights collaborative academic dialogue as a means of responsibly adapting LIS programs to shifting technological landscapes. Hossain et al. (2025) examined South Asian students from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Both studies highlight the necessity of enhancing AI literacy education and integrating it into the LIS curriculum to ensure the employability of current and future library and information science professionals. They pointed out ‘the necessity of integrating robust AI literacy programs within LIS education that cover technical skills, ethical guidelines, and critical AI use’ (2025, p. 12). Another article by Youngman et al. (2023) examines the impact of algorithmic technologies (e.g., AI, machine learning) on LIS education in the USA. The authors call for critical pedagogical approaches to integrating algorithmic technologies into LIS curricula and advocate for a more careful approach to how LIS education engages with emerging technologies. They state, ‘our arrival at this next critical juncture in LIS will set the stage for future considerations of the role of digital technologies in our professional and educational praxis’ (2023, p. 8). The issue of professional training for librarians to equip them for increasingly AI-integrated workplaces is also at the heart of Ghosh & McCoy’s (2024) article, which explored how AI is and can be incorporated into the core competencies taught to students in the MLIS program at San José State University, ‘thus preparing MLIS graduates to lead in an AI-integrated future, enhancing their capability to serve diverse and evolving community needs’ (2024, p. 1). Another example is Tait & Pierson’s (2022) study; although published before ChatGPT’s disruptive launch, they had already explored the emerging role of AI and robotics in the library and information service sector and their implications for LIS education in Australia. Their content analysis of accredited LIS course syllabi revealed a significant gap: only one subject explicitly mentioned AI, and none referenced robotics. Despite this, the authors remain optimistic about the future developments in this area as ‘the LIS domain has unique disciplinary contributions to make, and its education can provide a powerful support to the information professionals of tomorrow with a nuanced understanding of AI’ (2022, p. 270). To date, no studies exploring the integration of AI and AI Literacy competencies into European LIS curricula or the perspectives of LIS students in European institutions have been published in the literature, a gap that we seek to partly fill with the research reported here.

Methodology

For this small-scale study, we conducted an anonymous online survey targeting all enrolled MLIS and Graduate Diploma in LIS students in UCD's iSchool during the 2024-2025 academic year. This survey, which consisted of a 21-item questionnaire with open- and closed-ended questions, was hosted on the University-approved SurveyMonkey platform, conforming to EU GDPR data protection requirements. The survey design and questionnaire construction followed established principles of survey research, including alignment with the research questions, use of mixed question formats, and logical thematic grouping (Andres, 2025).

Closed-ended questions comprised a mixture of multiple-choice and Likert scale-type questions and were developed by the authors based on the research questions underpinning the study aims. Questions were organised under five headings. Students participating in the survey were required to read information about the study before starting the questionnaire and were informed on the survey launch page that by proceeding to the questions, they were consenting to participate in the study. However, they were free to withdraw at any time. No identifying information, such as names or email addresses, were collected from the students.

Students were recruited through the total population sampling method, consisting of 58 MLIS students (full- and part-time) and 3 Graduate Diploma LIS students (full- and part-time), which gave a target population of 61 students in total. An invitation to participate in the survey was shared with the students via the campus targeted email system, the institutional Learning Management System Brightspace, and the dedicated Google Chat space for students on these programmes. The survey remained open from April 4 to April 21, 2025. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Quantitative responses were analysed using SurveyMonkey's online analysis tool. Qualitative responses to Questions 20 and 21 were reviewed independently by each author, followed by low-level manual coding in Excel for all data to identify emerging themes. This thematic qualitative text analysis followed the iterative, deductive-inductive approach outlined by Kuckartz and McWhertor (2014).

Findings

Survey findings are presented below under six headings, corresponding to the questionnaire sub-sections.

Demographics

Thirty-six students completed the questionnaire, giving a survey response rate of 59%. Most of these students (n=34) were in the one-year full-time MLIS or Graduate Diploma LIS programme at the time of the survey, with just two students (n=2) in the second year of the part-time MLIS programme.

Knowledge and perception of AI in libraries and information services

To gain a baseline sense of the students' AI knowledge, they were asked first to rate their familiarity with the concept of AI. It should be noted that a definition of AI, drawn from the Information Commissioner's Office in the UK (Information Commissioner's Office, 2025) was presented to the students in the information page at the start of the questionnaire to provide context for the survey; however, no inferences about the specific nature of each participant's understanding of the concept can be drawn from their responses to this question. As shown in Figure 1, 44% of the students indicated they were *very familiar* with the concept of AI, followed by 53%, who stated they were *somewhat familiar*, meaning that 97% of students had at least some degree of knowledge of AI at the time of the survey. Only one participant was *not so familiar* with the concept of AI.

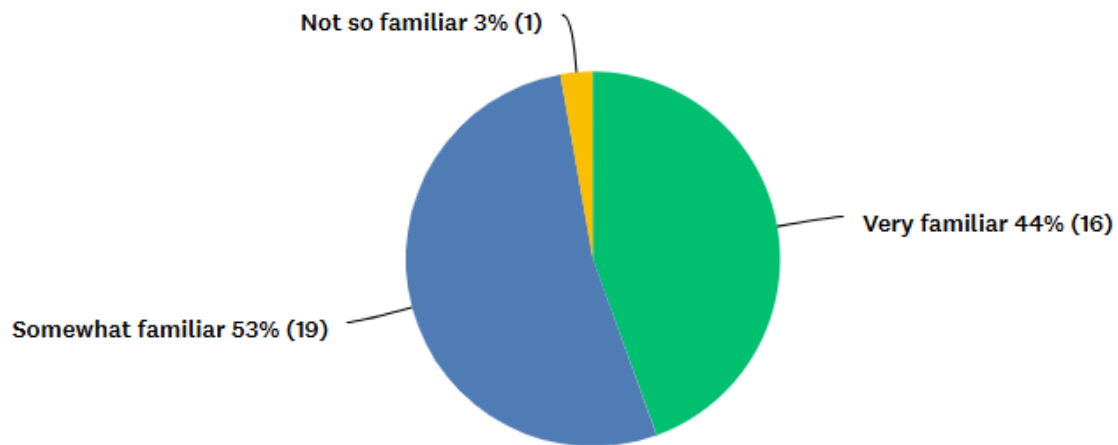


Figure 1. Familiarity with AI

When asked whether they believe that AI has the potential to transform libraries and information services (Q6: *Do you believe AI has the potential to transform Libraries and Information Services in the future?*), 14% of LIS students strongly agreed, 56% agreed, 17% neither agreed nor disagreed, 11% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. To further explore their perceptions, an additional question asked the students to identify the areas of Library and Information Services in which they think AI can be most beneficial (Q7: *In which areas of Library and Information Services do you think AI can be most beneficial?*). As shown in Table 1, students most frequently identified accessibility, cataloguing, customer service, and information retrieval as areas where AI could be beneficial. Other areas chosen by the students included personalised recommendations for library resources (39%), automated book sorting and shelving (28%), data analysis for collection management (36%), and digitisation and preservation (17%). Only a small number of students perceived a beneficial role for AI in scholarly communication and research data management (6%) and instruction and outreach services (6%). Five students (14%) indicated that they do not think that AI is beneficial in Library and Information Services.

Area of Library and Information Services where AI may benefit	Percentage	Number (n=)
I do not think that AI is beneficial in Library and Information Services	14%	5
Cataloguing and metadata creation	58%	21
Instruction and outreach services	6%	2
Information searching and retrieval via different databases and/or AI tools	47%	17
Chatbots and virtual assistants for customer service	53%	19
Scholarly Communication and Research Data Management	6%	2
Personalised recommendations for library resources	39%	14
Automated book sorting and shelving	28%	10
Digitisation and preservation of resources	17%	6
Data analysis for collection management	36%	13
AI for accessibility (e.g., text-to-speech, language translation)	64%	23
Other (please specify)	0%	0

Table 1. Area of Library and Information Service where AI may benefit

A further question asked the students which AI technologies they had personally encountered in LIS services to date (Q8: *What AI technologies have you encountered in a Library and Information Service setting?*). Students were presented with a list of options and invited to select all AI technologies that they had encountered previously. The top option selected was Chatbots (58%), followed by text-to-speech or language translation tools for accessibility (39%), AI-driven search engines or discovery tools (39%), AI-powered recommendation systems (33%), and virtual reference assistants (19%). Seven students stated that they had not yet encountered any of the options presented to them in a library and information service setting.

AI in MLIS and graduate diploma LIS education

Students were asked if AI had been integrated into their MLIS or Graduate Diploma LIS coursework or programme. Eighty-six percent of students reported that it had been integrated, with just five students (13%) indicating that they were unsure if this had been the case (Q9: *Has AI been integrated into your MLIS/GradDip coursework or programme?*). Students who answered yes to this question were also invited to describe how and where this had been implemented. The responses to this open-ended question broadly captured the ways in which some of the lecturers on the programmes during 2024-2025 had incorporated activities and assessments in their modules that were designed to promote hands-on usage of AI tools, as well as critical analysis of AI-generated output, and general discussions about AI and the issues surrounding it. One participant described how *‘Several assignments related to rudimentary uses of AI. One assignment was related to its ability to generate metadata or for cataloging. Another on its use as a generative essay writing tool’*, while another noted that *‘Every module I’ve taken has had a discussion on AI at some point. Two assignments (Cataloguing and Digital Libraries) required the use of AI for the class to assess it.’* Regarding these modules, another participant provided a more detailed description:

‘In the Cataloguing module: we had to grade a generative AI’s [sic] (e.g., Google Gemini) to catalogue a book according to MARC 21. In Digital Libraries: we have to ask a generative AI tool (e.g., Google Gemini) to write a one-page essay on a topic in the module and grade it.’

Some of the students had also taken a specific module on AI and Ethics, which involved ‘auditing AI platforms as part of the final assignment.’ Another participant noted how ‘Teachers are non-stop talking about it, bringing it up constantly, have done AI exercises in class or required for assignment[s] to explore the accuracy and such.’

The answers to the next question (Q10: What AI-related topics or skills do you feel should be included in the MLIS/GradDip curriculum?) clearly pointed to a strong demand for the inclusion of AI in both programmes, with students identifying multiple priority areas, as shown in Table 2.

AI-related topics and skills for inclusion in LIS curriculum	Percentage	Number (n=)
Introduction to AI and machine learning concepts	56%	20
AI for instruction and outreach	11%	4
Ethics, privacy and security in AI applications	86%	31
AI in library automation (cataloguing, indexing, etc.)	39%	14
Chatbot development and AI-based customer service	14%	5
Using AI for data analysis and library management	33%	12
AI for digital preservation and archives	17%	6
Practical AI tools (e.g., prompt engineering, AI-powered search engines, recommendation systems)	31%	11
Other (please specify)	14%	5

Table 2. AI-related topics and skills for inclusion in LIS curriculum

A striking finding was the overwhelming demand for education on ethics, privacy, and security, with 86% of respondents selecting this option. This far surpassed all other topics, identifying it as the foremost concern for the students. Foundational knowledge, such as an Introduction to AI and machine learning, was also highly valued (55%). Other significant areas of interest included AI in library automation (38%), using AI for data analysis and library assessment (33%), and practical AI tools, such as prompt engineering and AI-powered search engines (30%), reflecting a desire for both theoretical understanding and practical skills. In contrast, more specialised and technical topics such as AI for digital preservation and archives (16%), chatbot development (13%), and AI for instruction and outreach (11%) were less frequently selected, indicating lower interest at the time of the survey. Some students submitted open-text suggestions for other AI-related topics that could be integrated into the curriculum, including, ‘the difference between analytic AI and generative AI. Recognising works which are disguised as human-made but are AI-generated,’ ‘how one’s personal life and values align with their AI habits’, and ‘environmental impacts of unnecessary AI use.’

Attitudes and concerns about AI in libraries and information services

Students were asked about their beliefs and concerns in relation to AI in libraries and information services via three specific questions.

Question 12 asked the students to identify their specific concerns around AI in the LIS workplace (Q12: What concerns do you have about the use of AI in Libraries and Information Services?). Nearly all respondents selected ethical implications (97%) in Table 3, with similarly high concern expressed for climate impacts (92%), algorithmic bias (94%), and privacy/data security (86%). A comparable percentage expressed worry about the ‘loss of human interaction in library services’ (86%). Labor-related concerns were present but somewhat less prevalent, including potential job

loss (69%) and job creep, meaning the addition of AI knowledge and skills to an existing role (58%). Equity-related risks, including inaccessibility for users with disabilities (61%) and the widening of the digital divide (53%), were also prominent. No students reported having no concerns.

Concerns about the use of AI in Libraries and Information Services	Percentage	Number (n=)
I do not have concerns	0%	0
Privacy and data security issues	86%	31
Potential job loss for library staff	69%	25
Job Creep: Adding AI knowledge and skills and usage to an existing role	58%	21
Bias in AI algorithms	94%	34
Ethical implications (e.g., misinformation, misuse)	97%	35
Lack of human interaction in library and information services	86%	31
Inaccessibility for users with disabilities	61%	22
Climate impact	92%	33
Widening of the digital divide	53%	19
Other (please specify)	8%	3

Table 3. Concerns about the use of AI in Libraries and Information Services

When asked about their perception of combining AI with human elements of service (Q13: *How do you perceive the impact of integrating AI with the human aspects of library and information services?*) Responses to Q13 (Table 4) indicate that most students perceive AI as diminishing, rather than enhancing, the human aspects of library service. By contrast, only a small proportion perceive AI as enhancing interpersonal engagement, with 17% selecting somewhat enhances and just 3% greatly enhances. A further 11% regard AI's impact as neutral.

Perceived Impact of AI Integration on Human Aspects of Library and Information Services	Percentage	Number (n=)
Greatly enhances – AI improves interactions by assisting librarians, personalising recommendations, and making services more accessible.	3%	1
Somewhat enhances – AI adds value but does not replace the importance of human interaction.	17%	6
Neutral – AI neither positively nor negatively affects interpersonal engagement in library services.	11%	4
Somewhat diminishes – AI reduces human interaction, making the experience less personal.	47%	17
Greatly diminishes – AI significantly replaces human engagement, negatively affecting the interpersonal experience.	22%	8

Table 4. Perceived Impact of AI Integration on Human Aspects of Library and Information Services

The students were also asked about the potential for AI to create new jobs in the LIS sector (Q14: *Do you think AI will create new roles or job opportunities in the Library and Information Services field?*). In response to this, a significant proportion of students (44%) expressed the belief that AI will mostly replace current jobs in the Library and Information Services field, reflecting a strong concern about its potential disruptive impact on employment. Around 28% think only a few new roles will be created, while an equal 28% remain uncertain about AI's influence on job opportunities. Notably, no students expect AI to generate many new roles, indicating a lack of confidence in AI as a driver of substantial job creation within the sector.

Perceptions of self-efficacy with AI in libraries and information services

In this section, students answered questions on their self-perceived competence and skills in relation to AI. We asked students to indicate how confident they felt in their ability to understand and work with AI technologies (Q17: *How confident are you in your ability to understand and work with AI technologies in a Library and Information Service setting?*). As shown in Figure 2, 3% of students reported feeling *extremely confident*, and 14% reported being *very confident*. The largest group, 40%, indicated feeling *somewhat confident*. Meanwhile, 31% of students described themselves as *not so confident*, and 11% reported being *not at all confident*.

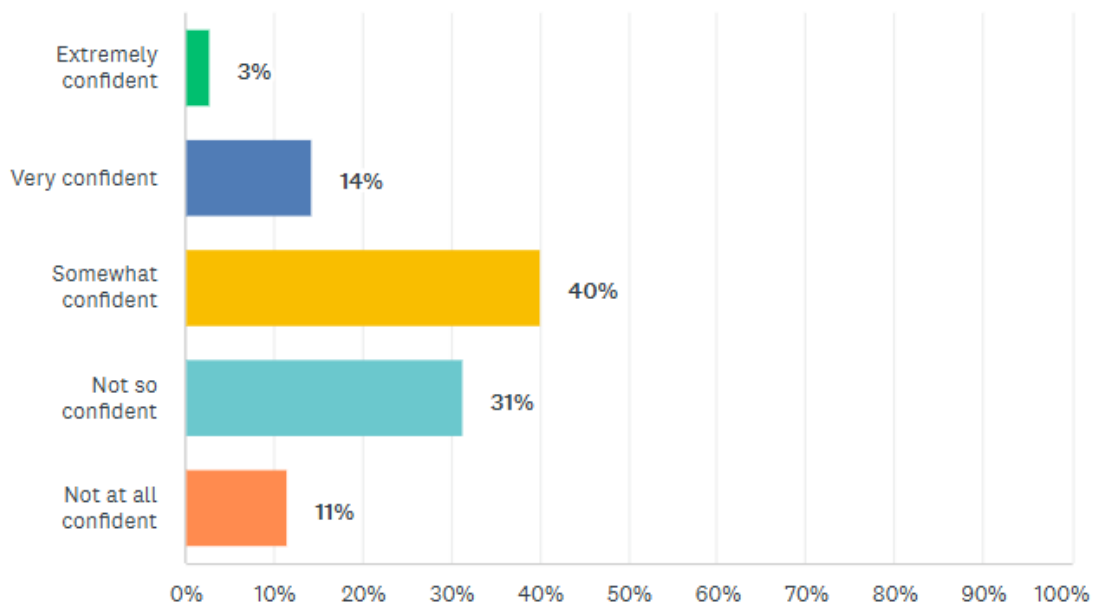


Figure 2. Student confidence perception and AI

Building on this, students were then asked about the extent to which they feel prepared to incorporate AI into their future careers. Only one student reported *feeling very prepared*, while 23% (n=8) noted that they *felt prepared*. A further 29% (n=10) described themselves as *neutral* on this issue. Conversely, 31% (n=11) indicated they were *not very prepared*. At the same time, five students reported feeling not prepared at all (Q18: *How prepared do you feel to incorporate AI into your future Library and Information Services career (e.g., using AI in library management, assisting patrons with AI tools, etc.?)*).

Finally, to investigate their formal education, students were asked to what extent they think that their MLIS or Graduate Diploma LIS degree has prepared them to work with AI in professional roles (Figure 3). Similar to Q17, only one student selected *very well prepared*, agreeing that their education had provided comprehensive knowledge and skills for integrating AI into their work. At the same time, 40% reported feeling *somewhat prepared*, meaning that they had achieved some foundational knowledge but need additional training to use AI effectively. The largest group (46%) indicated a *neutral* position, stating that their education had touched on AI but did not provide depth. A further 11% described themselves as *somewhat unprepared*, suggesting that their programme had provided little guidance on AI, and that they therefore require significant additional learning. No student perceived that their programme had left them feeling *not at all prepared*.

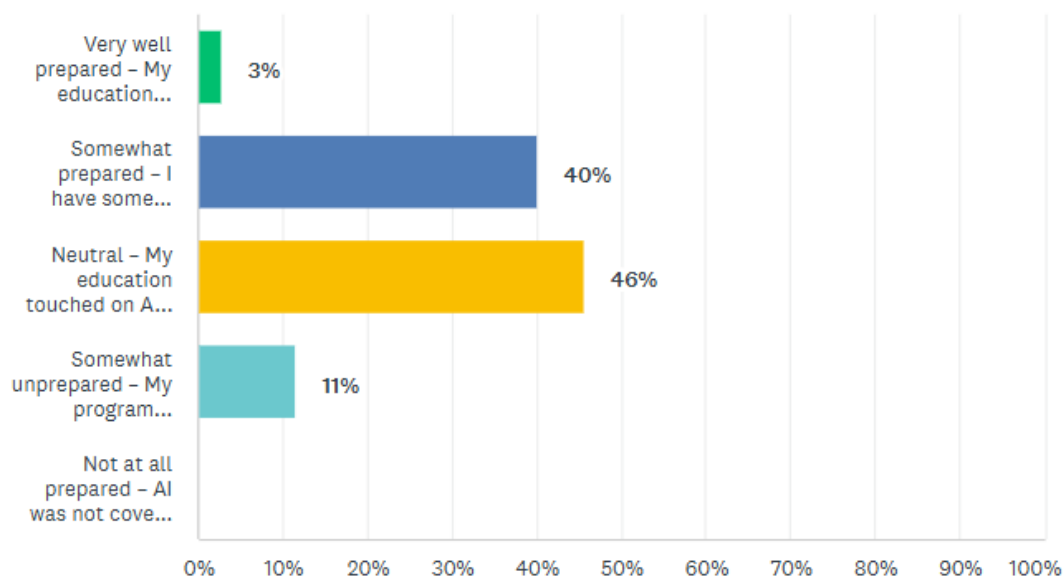


Figure 3. Perceived Preparedness from MLIS or GradDip Program for Using AI in Professional Roles

Outlook and additional feedback

In response to Q20 (Q20: *How do you envision the role of AI in Libraries and Information Services five years from now?*), 24 students (66%) provided qualitative comments reflecting a mix of cautious optimism and concern. Several recurring themes emerged. The most prominent theme was *Workload Support and Efficiency* (n=15), with students frequently suggesting that AI could assist with routine, time-consuming tasks such as cataloguing and metadata creation, thereby reducing staff workloads. One student hoped AI would '*automate a lot of the cataloguing and metadata jobs*' (student 8), while another anticipated it would operate largely in the background, '*aid[ing] workloads & efficiency*' (student 19). Concerns about *Job Security and Role Change* (n=7) were also evident, with some students expressing anxiety that AI might be used to justify staff reductions in an already under-resourced sector. As one participant cautioned, '*I am conscious [that] it may be used as an excuse to replace staff, considering libraries are often resource poor*' (student 20). Others, however, expressed guarded optimism, hoping that AI would function as an assistive tool rather than a replacement for human labour, with one student stating, '*I don't think it will cause job losses*' (student 1). The theme of *Human Interaction and Professional Values in LIS* (n=6) further highlighted students' emphasis on preserving the relational and community-focused dimensions of librarianship. While acknowledging AI's potential to manage routine functions, participants stressed that core professional responsibilities involving creativity, judgement, and engagement should remain human-led. As one student observed, '*the portions of the job which involve creation and human interaction with the community would still be fulfilled by humans*' (student 10), while another warned against the loss of '*face-to-face interaction with library personnel*' (student 3). Another theme was the call for *AI/Gen Literacy Training* (n=4), including the need for librarians to '*inform patrons of the pros and cons of AI*' (student 1), and to take a role in '*educating the public in recognition of AI, what it produces, and its uses*' (student 6). Others agreed, noting that '*I think LIS professionals have the responsibility to educate their library community about responsible AI use*' (student 15) and '*I think we will have to educate others about it in a teaching role*' (student 24).

A concern about *Job-Creep* was brought up by several students (n=3), as '*well [sic] spend a solid part of your job managing and troubleshoot [sic] the AI that is train [sic] to do our job*' (student 4) or '*AI still needs a lot of supervision to perform the job properly*' (student 12). Concerns about *AI Risks and Ethics* emerged to a lesser extent (n=3), with mention of '*hopefully LIS will set standards for*

responsible and ethical AI use' (student 13), and the need for 'mainly librarians being damage control for misinformation' (student 4).

In response to Q21 (Q21: Do you have any additional thoughts on the integration of AI in your MLIS education or its potential in Libraries and Information Services?), 20 students (56%) provided qualitative feedback reflecting a range of perspectives on AI education and its implications for the profession. Several key themes emerged. The most prominent theme was *AI and General Literacy Training* (n=13), with students emphasising the need for a stronger and more comprehensive understanding of how AI systems function and how they can be applied in LIS contexts. One participant noted that 'one single class focusing on a more in-depth explanation of how LLMs work would be beneficial' (student 9), and another stressed the importance of learning not only how to use AI tools, but also how to teach others to use them effectively (student 19). The theme of *Human Interaction and Professional Values in LIS* (n=12) again underscored concern about preserving the profession's human-centred identity amid increasing automation. Students cautioned that an emphasis on technological relevance should not come at the expense of core professional values and the public good. As one student observed, 'the growing push for AI use ignores the human for the desire to stay relevant' (student 5), another suggested that discussions of AI should explicitly address 'if and how it affects the public good librarians are meant to uphold' (student 8). Concerns about *AI Risks and Ethics* (n=10) formed another significant theme. Students called for balanced, critical engagement with AI that addressed ethical challenges, misinformation, and environmental impacts alongside potential benefits. One participant expressed worry about AI 'taking the jobs of creatives and thinkers' (student 8), while another highlighted the 'environmental impacts of continuous AI use' and questioned its necessity in librarianship (student 14). More cautiously positive perspectives emerged under *Workload Support and Efficiency* (n=4), where students viewed AI as a tool to support repetitive or time-intensive tasks rather than replace professional judgement. As one student suggested, AI applications in cataloguing 'might free up the staff's time so they can focus on tasks that require more attention' (student 10). Finally, *Job Security and Role Concern* (n=3) captured ongoing anxieties about the potential for AI to be leveraged as a cost-saving measure, with one participant noting that decision-makers might favour 'cheap AI labour compared to hiring human staff' (student 10).

Discussion

These study findings offer interesting insights into how a cohort of trainee LIS professionals at UCD's iSchool are responding to emerging AI developments in the sector, as well as their beliefs about the knowledge and skills that they will need to successfully navigate professional roles requiring AI-related competencies. The research also captures some early efforts of LIS educators to include AI-related content, activities, and discussion in their courses, and points to an environment of exploration and experimentation, as the LIS sector and discipline grapple with the challenge of AI and the issues it raises.

Overall, the students' responses paint a picture of uncertainty and ambivalence, framed by a general acceptance that AI is likely to have a transformative effect on library and information services, although there is a notable minority who are either unsure or who actively resist this idea. Serious concerns about AI exist side-by-side with a strong desire to learn more about it in the context of LIS practice, and to develop a greater understanding of its potential uses and effects. While not particularly confident at the time of the survey about their ability to work with AI in their roles post-graduation, most of the students indicated that they do not feel completely unprepared for it, although the need for more robust training was clearly expressed.

The students' concerns about AI and LIS broadly reflect the issues that have been raised in recent literature (e.g., Houston & Corrado, 2023; Johnson et al, 2024). Ethics, bias, privacy, misinformation, and climate impact are prominent themes, along with a sense of unease and encroaching disillusionment regarding the potential implications of increased AI use for the human aspects of

library service (Hodonu-Wusu, 2025). Many of the students perceive AI as a factor that will diminish rather than enhance human interaction and engagement, highlighting the concern that its integration may reduce the personal, human-centred qualities central to library and information services. While the students did also perceive some benefits, citing AI in libraries and information services as a tool for efficiency in cataloguing and repetitive tasks, the counterpoint to this was a persistent emphasis on the ongoing importance of human interaction and professional expertise, particularly in the students' open-ended comments. The concerns expressed by the students and elsewhere in the literature point to an opportunity for librarians to serve as mediators, educators, and protectors of responsible AI use. At the same time, doubt about the speed and extent of adoption shows cautious optimism, tempered by worries that AI might be misused to justify workforce cuts. These themes together show both the opportunities and worries linked to AI adoption, emphasising a vision where librarians stay central in shaping how AI is used in practice.

In terms of how AI-related content and training can be incorporated into the LIS curriculum, the survey responses conveyed a sense that while some lecturers had made efforts in this regard, and it was a good start, it was not enough to adequately equip the students for the evolving AI-integrated workplace. In this iSchool, our experience is similar to what Morris and Malady (2025) noticed:

LIS faculty have engaged in university-sponsored, cohort-based seminars around research and publication ethics and AI, as well as school-level discussions about AI in pedagogy facilitated by a community of practice. Department-level dialogues tend to centre on topics of academic policy but not necessarily LIS curricular integrations, at least as of yet (p.560).

The students expressed clear ideas about the topics that could be added to the curriculum, and these were headed up by themes reflecting their most pressing concerns, namely ethics, privacy, and security, as well as foundational knowledge about how AI systems work. These topics reflect definitions and models of AI literacy proposed in recent years, including those articulated in Kandlhofer et al (2016), Long and Magerko (2020), and the aggregate model proposed by Ng et al (2021), all of which blend pragmatic and contextual elements, such as knowing how AI works in practice, as well as understanding how to apply it in meaningful and ethical ways to different problems, and critically assessing its applications and outputs. The students' suggestions also align with Ghosh & McCoy (2024), who note the critical need to update the existing body of professional competencies that underpin library and information work to include digital literacy, AI ethics, and data privacy, amongst other knowledge and skill areas. Notably, AI-related competencies have begun to surface in competency frameworks for LIS professionals in recent years, with the goal of ensuring workplace readiness. The concerns articulated by our students align strongly with these frameworks. For example, the UK-based CILIP Professional Skills and Knowledge Base (PKSB) identifies AI and algorithmic literacy as a core knowledge/skill area, which encompasses helping people understand how AI works and affects society, the human and cultural influences on its outputs, and how to critically evaluate AI-driven search, analytics, and decision-making (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2021). Similarly, the ACRL AI Competencies for Academic Library Workers, approved in October 2025, sets out a list of defined professional competencies grouped into four salient categories: Ethical Considerations; Knowledge & Understanding; Analysis & Evaluation; and Use & Application (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2025). Studies such as this, coupled with the AI training needs suggested by formal competency frameworks, present an increasingly clear mandate on AI for those charged with developing curricula for professional LIS programmes.

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings emphasise both the potential and challenges AI presents to the LIS profession. Students recognise its ability to improve efficiency and expand professional roles, while

also voicing concerns about its ethical, social, and human implications. This study adds an often-overlooked student-centered perspective to LIS research on AI, offering insight into how emerging professionals critically evaluate its impact on future practice. These results highlight the need for LIS curricula to go beyond superficial exposure by integrating hands-on AI experiences alongside ongoing discussions of ethics, privacy, bias, and data literacy. Addressing this challenge requires educators and professional organisations to balance technical skills with core human-centered values, ensuring graduates are equipped to apply and critically evaluate AI tools. By enhancing AI literacy and aligning competency frameworks with these principles, the LIS community can foster responsible integration of AI into professional practice.

Limitations

This study is limited by its single-institution sample, which restricts generalisability. It also examined AI broadly rather than specific applications such as generative AI. Additionally, enrolment in a core cataloguing and metadata course may have introduced bias toward more favourable perceptions of AI in these areas.

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